The acquisition of low applicatives and dative “se” in L1 Spanish

María Ángeles Escobar Álvarez
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)
aescobar@flog.uned.es

Ismael Iván Teomiro García
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)
teomiro@flog.uned.es

Anticausative and inherent reflexive verbs, in (1a) and (1b) respectively, require the presence of clitic ‘se’ in Spanish (cf. Mendikoetxea, 1999; Teomiro, 2010, 2011). In contrast, other kinds of verbs, like consumption verbs, as in (2), and certain intransitive verbs like ‘caer(se)’ and ‘morir(se)’, as in (3), optionally allow for this clitic (Montrul, 2004).

Data from L1 acquisition (cf. Baauw, 2000) show that children have no difficulty with obligatory “se” with the former verbs in (1). Escobar & Torrens (2007, 2010) provide experimental data that support the hypothesis that children find the clitic “se” easier with anticausative verbs (1a) than with transitive verbs like (2). Furthermore, these authors also show that the acquisition of optional clitic “se” with verbs as in (3) is also problematic, since children tend not to use it at all provided the examples in (4), while there are no such omissions when clitic “se” is obligatory.

It could be argued that the difficulties with clitic “se” are due to its optional character. However, other configurations with obligatory “se” with verbs as in (5) are also acquired at later stages given the examples in (6) found in the same CHILDES corpus.

In adult syntax, clitic “se” with verbs as in (1) is argued to be either an inflexion element (Mendikoetxea, 1992) or an expletive-like argument (Teomiro, 2010, 2011), inserted in either derivation due to formal reasons rather than to semantic ones. In contrast, the syntactic configurations in (2) and (3) have in common the fact that “se” is within a low applicative phrase and thus is assigned dative Case (cf. Campini & Schäffer, 2011 and Teomiro, 2012). If we consider the Czech clitic “si” in examples in (7) as the equivalent counterpart of Spanish obligatory “se”, we observe that it is also marked as dative in this second language. This leads us to think that there is also a low applicative phrase in the configurations of (5) where the clitic “se” is related to the NP (head, knee, hands) by means of an applicative head which establishes an inalienable possession relation between both elements (Pylkkänen, 2008). Hence, we want to put forward a twofold analysis of clitic “se”: as an expletive with verbs as in (1), on the one hand; and, as a dative with verbs as in (2), (3) and (5), on the other hand. We assume that the difficulty we found with the examples in (4) and (6) is due to the fact that we are in front of dative “se” within a low applicative phrase. We assume that this complex derivation needs some time to be acquired. Actually, if the optional character of “se” was the reason for children’s difficulty, acquisition data in (6) would be unexpected since “se” in “romperse la quisma” break your head, or “mancharse la rodilla” stain your knee. is equally compulsory in adult grammar.

Examples

(1) a. La ventana *(se) cerró / rompió.
   The window CL closed / broke.
   “The windows broke / closed.”
   b. Juan *(se) peinó / lavó.
   Juan CL combed / washed.
   “Juan combed / washed (himself).”

(2) a. Juan (se) comió el bocadillo.
   Juan CL ate the sandwich.
   “Juan ate the sandwich.”
   b. Juan (se) leyó el libro.
   Juan CL read the book.
   “Juan read the book.”

(3) a. Juan (se) cayó.
Juan CL fell off.
“Juan fell off.”

b. Juan (se) murió.
Juan CL died.
“Juan died.”

(4) a. cayó la abuela (Magín 1;10)
fell the granny
“The granny fell.”

b. ha caído mamí (Magín 1;11)
has fallen mom
“Mom has fallen.”

c. Cayó # ota ve cayo # (Irene, 1;8)
fell.3rd.sing again fell.3rd.sing
“He fell again.”

d. lo cojo lo tito y Tina cayó (Irene 1;10)
CL ACC take1SG CL ACC throw1SG and Tina fell
“I take it and Tina fell.”
(cf. CHILDES, Spanish).

(5) a. Juan *(se) rompió la crisma.
Juan CL broke the head.
“Juan broke his head.”

b. Juan *(se) ha manchado la rodilla.
Juan CL has stained the knee.
“Juan has stained his knee.”

c. Juan *(se) ha lavado las manos.
Juan CL has washed the hands.
“Juan has washed his hands.”

(6) a. cayó y rompió la quisma
(Irene, 1;11)
fell1SG and broke1SG the head
“He fell and broke his head.”

b. ha manchado la rodilla (Magín 1;11)
has stained the knee
“He has stained the knee.”
(cf. CHILDES, Spanish).

(7) a. Jan se /*si myje každý den.
Jan CL-ACC/*CL-DAT washes every day
“Jan washes himself everyday.”

b. Jan *se /si myje zuby každý den.
Jan *CL-ACC/CL-DAT washes teethACC every day.
“Jan washes his teeth every day.”

References


